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GENTLEMEN—THE QUEEN

Legend told of a Wild
White Queen in the Mar-
tian wastelands — and so
there was, but . . .

THE THREE of us, Koenig majoring in electrical engineering, Evans working along advanced lines in chemistry, and myself . . . oh, I beg your pardon; allow me to introduce myself. I'm Putnam, Rawleigh '03. I dabble a bit in astrogation. As I was saying, the three of us were just returned to classes from the Christmas holidays, all feeling a mere touch of nostalgia for the old home town. There had been snow for Christmas, the

By Bob Tucker

first since 1983, or so the old-timers insisted. We found it rather disheartening to leave the beautiful snow-covered countryside to return to Rawleigh.

We were attempting to drown the mere touch in several mugs of beer at a little place just off the campus, when Tobru joined us. Tobru is a Martian. He didn't know what homesickness was but he was well acquainted with beer. So it was that during the evening we heard for the first time in our lives the legend, that amazing narration, of the wild woman of the planet Mars! It irritated me to realize so much of my life had been wasted not knowing her.

Tobru is a rather amazing fellow, and damned puzzling, too. A gawky person like most young Martians, he has spent nearly seven years at Rawleigh studying the ancient American Indian. What in the world he wanted to study Indians for no one knew; but all agreed there was no better place to study Indians, or any other subject under the sun, than here at Rawleigh. The famed seat of learning offers courses in every branch of knowledge existent!

After the ninth or tenth beer, Tobru leaned far over the table in a manner common to sinister plotters seen on the screen, and whispered,

"Listen! Would you hear of a wonderful story of my country?" He peered up and oggled the near-by tables, owlishly, and we did likewise. Our four heads came together over the mugs.

"Have you heard of the Wild Woman of Mars?" he asked suddenly, dramatically. "The untamed Queen of the Koru Range?"

"No!" Koenig fell into a whisper. "Is she really wild?"

"How wild?" I asked.

"What made her wild?" Evans demanded.

"Sssshhhhhh!" Tobru cautioned. "She is wild. Take my word. I have it on close authority."

"Straight from the horse's mouth, so to speak," suggested Koenig.

Tobru favored him with a puzzled glance. "I don't follow that."

"Never mind," I cut in. "A horse is an extinct animal. Let's hear the legend."

"Is it connected with the Indians?" Tobru persisted.

"Yes, yes," I hastened to add again. "Horses used to ride Indians to and from their war dances, or perhaps it was the other way around. But get on with your

story." I threw a glance at Koenig. "And no more historical remarks, please."

TOBURU FIRST consumed another beer. "Very well," he said. "It seems, I am told, that many, many years ago, perhaps twenty-five or so, a small stratosphere rocket crashed somewhere in the lower end of the Koru Range. In this rocket were three people: an old and half-crazed miner searching for gold, his young and pretty wife, and their small daughter, age perhaps two or three years—earth years. These were earth people.

"Now, as you know, the Koru Range is pretty rugged mountain country, and sad to say, rescue parties never found them, nor even the remains of the ship. To this day their fate remains a mystery, one of the very few unsolved disappearances on Mars. It was assumed, after the passing of months, and then years, that all aboard the little craft had perished and the search was accordingly cancelled.

"And then, four or five years ago, an old prospector drifted in with some fanciful reports of seeing a wild woman hunting in the Koru Range. He claimed she had a pack of Martian rats with her. She was described to be a beautiful young woman, quite the prettiest creature the old miner had set eyes on in many a year. He trailed her for hours before she got down wind of him, saw him, and slipped away into the caves!"

Tobru paused, his gawky head bounced up from the huddle to sweep the nearer tables suspiciously. Before coming back down he paused to gulp another beer. We were too fascinated to protest.

"His story, of course, was scouted as a fantastic mirage. Nobody would believe such a tale from an old man who has lived for months in the wilderness!"

"No, nobody," Koenig agreed.

"Nobody," Evans seconded.

"Quiet!" I had to insist. "Continue Tobru."

"The old miner's story was promptly discounted and forgotten. Until one day there came a government mapper with a startlingly similar report. He claimed to have seen her high in the mountains, many miles from the region in which the miner had found her. The pack of rats was not with her. The mapper had no chance to get nearer for she saw him almost instantly and whisked away.

"After that, stories began to appear with

regularity. First she was here, then she was there, always miles and miles apart. If one believed all the stories, the girl covered hundreds of miles a day, and sometimes managed to be in two places at the same time. For instance, one source claimed to have seen her just outside Packrat, which is a mining town near the equator, while a bare few minutes later the radio announced she was spotted wandering around naked in the polar regions.

"By then someone remembered the crash of the strato ship, twenty-five years before. It was first suggested the wild woman was the wife of the miner, but this was quickly discarded because of the time angle. She would have been much too old to be mountain hopping; and only in one detail did all the reports agree: the wild girl was young, lithe, and pretty."

"Pretty," Koenig commented.

"Beautiful!" Evans countered.

"Ravishing, no doubt, but stop interrupting!" I said.

"So it was decided," Tobru continued, "—among those who accepted the story, that it was the little daughter now grown to womanhood, grown to a mature wildness because of the isolation in that mountain fastness. She would be about the correct age to fit with the descriptions of her. It was quite natural, and most amazing, that she should grow up alone, or perhaps almost alone, in that untamed country!"

Tobru stopped and regarded us owlshly. We hung there over beer mugs, waiting.

"Well?" I demanded at last.

"That's all. No one has ever captured her. The authorities, of course, scout the tale, pointing to the obvious impossibilities to the entire legend. They claim it is impossible for anyone, much less a young woman, to exist in that country for any length of time unaided. And there is no use pushing them . . ." he spread his hands. ". . . you know how stubborn Martians are!"

We silently agreed. We knew of a Martian who spent seven years pursuing dead Indians.

"So she has become a legend, one that grows with each telling, added to now and then by a factual report of some old prospector claiming to have glimpsed her, her and her wild pack of rats!" He stopped and looked around for another full mug. "But this much is certain: she is wild, young, beautiful—Queen of the Koru Range!"

At our silent question then, he pounded his fist on the table top, glared around beligerently.

"Yes, gentlemen, I have seen her!"

"Marvellous!" I was the first to cry.

"Incredible!" Evans exclaimed.

"Romantic!" Koenig insisted.

"I want more beer!" Tobru shouted.

And at eleven that evening the campus police cleared the place of sophomores, there was naught else to do but return to our rooms and speculate on the legend and its million implications. We left Tobru quite drunk, conversing with imaginary Indians.

WE CORNERED Tobru again before many days had passed. He was resting under a shady oak, the city officials having decided to cause Spring early this year to offset the snow, and it was quite warm.

"Just think! gentlemen," he greeted us as we walked up. "It is just possible that Indians once lolled about under this very tree. Perhaps even made love, or were killed here. Fascinating, isn't it?"

"Yes, definitely," Evans agreed. "I can think of nothing more fascinating than being killed under this tree."

Tobru reproached him. "Please! The sense of humor possessed by Earthlings is at times outrageous! The death of an Indian is no joking matter."

"Neither is mine for that matter," Evans said. "But Tobru, we have a proposition to offer you."

"A fascinating proposition," Koenig put in.

"Please, gentlemen," I protested. "We agreed that I should be spokesman." I turned to the Martian. "Tobru, we have been giving a lot of thought to your story of the other night. Frankly, the legend ah . . . (I almost said fascinated) . . . interests us exceedingly. To the point, even, to, ah . . ." I hesitated. What would Tobru think?

"Yes?" that worthy prompted. There was warmth in his voice.

"Tobru, we three have decided to go to Mars. To search for the Wild Queen! We want you to go with us. You know the country!"

He pondered this, came up with the objection we were expecting. "What about my Indians? I take it, you plan on going this summer when the term is out? Gentlemen, I'd like to accommodate you, but I had

planned on a trip West this year to investigate some mounds."

So we began to talk. I was well prepared for this. I knew in advance what his objections would be and primed myself for them. We sat there in the shade of the oak and argued for hours, at least, it seemed to be for hours. I used every trick I knew of to win him over short of promising him money; that would have been below our stations. In the end, he weakened, and by my managing to keep my two cronies silent at this crucial moment, I won him to the cause.

"Very well," he said at last. "I will accompany you. But mark you, gentlemen, we must be back early! I want to do some work out West before the Fall term commences." And Tobru laid plans to return to Rawleigh for the coming year.

We were jubilant. For a few weeks.

And then the newscasters announced a small tribal uprising had broken out on Mars. Visitors would be banned for the duration of the summer. The trouble was isolated to a few localities, but because of the nature of it, could easily spread to other uneducated localities and become a full-fledged uprising if the proper caution was not taken. We would not be allowed on the planet this year!

Koenig paced the room and engaged in some choice, but very gentlemanly swearing. Evans and I felt equally disheartened. It was maddening, this being so close to the end of the term, so near our goal, to have this happen. We fretted and fumed, planned to the point where it could have been called a plot.

And with the end of school, we decided to go anyway!

Our final plan was complicated but complete. Koenig furnished the most of it, he was the imaginative one. We would ship to Mars separately, by widely different routes and methods. There must be no possible suspicion thrown on us by our leaving together for a common destination.

Tobru, he planned, would simply return home. There could be nothing more natural, and the authorities could not forbid him. Once there, he would hire a small stratosphere ship capable of carrying five (but he must make sure not to mention any such figure!), load it with provisions, not so as to suggest rations for five, but to indicate the one man, Tobru, wished to be out all summer long; although the seasons wouldn't match with Earth, he being a

Rawleigh student, the circumstances would be known. He was to pose as an archeologist, hunting fossils. The ship was to be hired for the season, paid for in advance as well as food and fuel bills. That would appear most natural to the people renting the ships and to the police in their monthly check-ups. Meanwhile I was to take passage on the same liner carrying Tobru home.

The how was left to me; I could bribe, stowaway, hire out as a cabin boy, or anyway I chose, just so I got to Mars. Once there, I was to jump ship when Tobru left it.

I WAS to make my way to Packrat, hire a cabin in the foothills, buy a small supply of food so as to suggest my staying there for a week or two, and simply vanish into the cabin and await the others.

Koenig and Evans were to hire themselves out on different ships putting off for Mars, freighters, liners or whatever they had the good fortune to find. Once there, they, too, were to jump ship, make their way by round-about routes to my cabin in the foothills. By that time Tobru should have our strato ship there. Our search would be on!

It sounded . . . well, simply fascinating! My pulse tingled in anticipation of the venture! In my imagination I painted the girl as most fiction accounts would have her: a wild, lithe, gorgeous creature with wonderful windblown hair, dark hair streaming in the wind as she flew over the ground, kissed by sunshine! Sparkling blue eyes devoid of all the tawdriness of civilization, full of carefree devilishness and eager life! Creamy white skin flashing in the sun, tall, dynamic, beautiful! A wonderful treasure of femininity to behold. It was then that the thought struck me.

We were meeting for the last time in that little spot just off the campus. Mugs filled our table. Most of the room was bare, many of the students having already departed for places elsewhere. The three of us sat in golden silence, the treasures of our thoughts shining in our eyes. I believe the power of it somewhat sobered us. And then, as I said, this thing occurred to me.

"Gentlemen," I broke the silence, "—for we are gentlemen. There is a rather delicate matter in connection with our quest to bring up at this time. I am rather mildly surprised one of us hasn't thought of it before. It is . . . ah, rather delicate."

"Do you mean," Koenig asked, "who is going to pay the check?"

"I only drank three!" Evans made haste to add.

"No, no, nothing like that! Gentlemen, consider our quest. Hold in your minds a picture of our goal, what we actually propose to do! Imagine her. Imagine further, picture our bringing her back to civilization! Now consider please the implications involved in our bringing her back with us! Do you begin to understand?"

They looked at me, startled. Evans opened his mouth to speak and couldn't trust himself, closed again.

"Do you mean . . . ?" Koenig whispered, tightly.

"Exactly!" I nodded, and swept a beer to my mouth. "Consider it, gentlemen. Here are three of us—I shan't count Tobru, being interested only in Indians—three of us about to set forth upon a common goal. We simply cannot bring back that goal to be the toy of civilization. The question is: to whom belongs the spoils? Which of us is to have the honor of marrying the girl?"

THE PROBLEM lay like an unexploded bomb in the stunned silence.

"A student is forbidden to possess a wife," Evans quoted quietly. "But I, for one, will be glad to sacrifice my career to make a home for her!"

"And I!" chimed in Koenig. "I am more than willing to protect her! I can always secure employment in any of the myriad laboratories in the city."

"Likewise I" I said calmly, determined. "I'll toss astrology overboard for a chance of being the husband of the Wild Queen. But . . . that isn't the question, exactly. The thing to decide is, which of us is to do the honors?"

"We might toss a coin." Koenig suggested.

"I object!" snapped Evans. "The lady's honor is to be considered. We cannot lower her reputation by gambling for her possession!"

"Quite right," I agreed. "Some honorable, moral means must be found, something of which she would approve. For remember, we expect to be together afterwards. The lucky man wouldn't care to be embarrassed by her finding out how we chose him!"

"Well," Evans hazarded, ". . . we might duel."

I shuddered. "No!" The beer burned my throat. "I wouldn't care to marry her deformed, earless or something. She would want a whole man . . . something more than just his personality."

"Well, then, what do you suggest?"

"It has occurred to me," I said, "that while not necessarily gambling, we still might make a sporting chance of it. Supposing, say, that we cooperate fully—one hundred percent—on this quest, until we come in sight of our goal. Actual, physical sight. Once we have seen her for the first time, it is every man for himself! The first man to her side wins her hand!"

"Bravo!" from Koenig.

"Excellent!" Evans stood up.

"May the best man win!" I whispered, awed. We clicked mugs.

We were again to be disappointed. Tobru announced that he could not desert his Indian chase, his really fascinating Indian hunt, to accompany us!

He had, he said, learned of a new mound somewhere in the West, along the banks of the Mississippi, a mound heretofore undiscovered and therefore unopened. If true, this was indeed a rare find; secretly, I did not blame him for deserting us. To him, as this trip was to us, it was the chance of a lifetime.

However, he offered to do the right thing. He said he not only could, but would arrange everything on his home planet for us, short of going himself. A faithful friend of his would fulfil his part of the obligation and deliver the strato ship, with the required provisions, to the cabin at the appointed time. After that we were on our own. We decided to accept this; really, we could do nothing else. The vital ship would be there with the supplies. We must carry on!

But it would take weeks. He would have to write his friend, enclosing money, because the authorities would certainly question such a message by any other mode of communication. He suggested waiting a few weeks so as to allow the letter to reach its destination. We made up the money between us to enclose in Tobru's letter.

We bid good-bye to him the next day as he set out for the West. He wished us luck upon our quest, cautioned us, and was gone.

I HID AMONG some boulders in the foothills outside Packrat, and in this security looked down upon the little town.

It occurred to me that it would be necessary to alter our plans somewhat.

Packrat was a smouldering pile of wreckage. A visiting band of guerilla raiders had preceded me by a few hours.

As the thought came to me of the possibility of the Martians still being in the district, an odd little noise at my back bore the thought out. I whirled around. The gawky fellow crouched there, grinning at me. There was something shining in his hand.

"Peace!" I chanted hopefully in the only native dialect I knew. "Peace to my Martian brother!" I hoped he understood.

He grinned again. "Hello, Rawleigh," he answered.

To say I was taken aback would be an understatement. I had gone to great length to perfect my disguise, had even forebore washing the dirt and scum of the space liner from me to further it. I knew I presented a not pretty picture. And the beggar knew my school—!

"Hello, yourself," I came back somewhat timidly. "Who are you; and how did you know me?"

"Your haircut," he said simply.

Of course! All the clothes in the world short of a Hindu turban wouldn't hide my college haircut. I cursed my shortsightedness. But this beggar? I turned back to him.

"Tobru said I would find you here." He waved the shining object. "Here is the key to your strato. It's over there behind that hut."

"What hut?" I asked in surprise. I couldn't see any.

"Come with me." He arose and slipped away. Not a hundred feet away I almost fell over the most beautiful camouflage job I have ever seen. It was a long, low building large enough to house a dozen people comfortably.

"I never knew these tourist and miners' huts were like this!" I exclaimed in surprise.

"They aren't." He surprised me again. "This isn't a hut. This belonged to a Martian named Yngvi. He was district governor for Packrat."

"Oh, but won't he object to our binging in this way? After all, we are strangers to him, you know."

"Not now, you aren't," Tobru's friend said. "He is among the corpses down in Packrat."

I swallowed my tongue, fumbled with the proper words. They wouldn't come. I

stared at him helplessly, and he must have interpreted my thoughts. He laughed merrily.

"Oh, don't mind that! Move in and make yourself at home. It's all right. He was a louse, anyway."

"But . . . about those raiders! Won't they come here looking for him, looting or something?"

"Not now," he assured me. "They will sack every hut in the district but this one. They know he is dead. There is no point to bothering him or his belongings further. You'll be safe here. The ship is in the rocks out back." He handed me the key and walked to the door. "Tell Tobru hello for me!" and he was gone.

I stared at the door stupidly for a second, then thought to ask him something. When I opened it and looked out he had vanished.

The ship was as he said and Tobru had promised. It was well hidden among the boulders and small hills. I had trouble finding it myself. The supplies were adequate for our needs. I felt entirely familiar with the controls, they being quite similar to the dummy ships in the labs at Rawleigh.

KOENIG AND EVANS put in appearance together later in the week. We were well ahead of schedule, making allowances for the delay of Tobru's letter. It was quite funny to watch them hunting for the place. They had imagined, of course, I would be in one of the little huts dotting the hills, and had examined one after another of these, only to find each sacked, sometimes razed, and now and then bearing a corpse. They claimed they were not worried about me, nevertheless I detected unhidden relief in their manner when at last we met.

Like myself, earlier, they nearly stumbled over the governor's house before they found it. Evans almost fell in the door. It was then necessary for me to repeat to them the story of my being there, the wrecking of the town, and the present circumstances of the last owner.

"And," I finished up, "it's about time we were getting out of here. The authorities will be here any day checking into the governor's last days and his belongings. They mustn't find us here!"

"Correct," echoed Koenig. "Let's go."

"Check!" cried Evans. "To the Queen!" I led the way out to the ship.

How we so calmly and unconsciously ambled through the picket line to the ship, I don't know. I only know that the three of us were at the ship's side when a sudden shout behind us caused us to turn. There around us was the ugliest ring of Martians, drunk apparently, I've laid eyes on. And we had walked right through them without seeing them!

"Back to the house!" Evans cried, and attempted to run.

"No!" I shouted. "Into the ship." I never saw a weapon raised, but something spanged on the hull and caromed away.

We climbed up and tumbled in with the howling madmen at our heels. Koenig slammed the lock shut. There were more shouts from without, dimmed by the walls, and a great number of guns were fired.

"You don't suppose they can puncture the hull?" Evans asked.

"I don't know," I said truthfully. "I'm not familiar with the structure of these ships. I certainly hope not!"

"Has it occurred to you, if I may be so bold as to question," Koenig put in, "that they cannot harm us if we take off?"

I inserted the key in the control panel and lifted the ship. The shouting and the shots died away below.

Koenig came back from a trip of inspection.

"Guess what? We have a passenger."

"One of the fools grabbed a rung below the lock and hung on. He's hanging out there now. Appears rather ill, too."

"I don't blame him," Evans said feelingly. "I rather think I would be ill myself."

We were flying over rugged terrain, the beginning of the mountain range. "Might as well set down," I offered. "We're getting into the mountains. We can drop him somewhere and begin our search from there. What say, gentlemen?"

The gentlemen agreed. I slanted rapidly towards the surface, while Koenig went to the lock in an attempt at communication with the uninvited guest. He was back almost at once.

"He's gone!"

"Who's gone?"

"Our passenger. The chap hanging outside!"

"Well, the rum!" Evans declared indignantly. "And he didn't even say thank you for the lift."

I glared at him, half sick, and turned my attention to landing the ship.

WELL, GENTLEMEN — " I paused and swept their faces. We were standing on a rocky ledge that fell away before us in three directions. The ship was behind us. "Gentlemen, our quest is begun! Who knows but that before the sun has set one of us will possess her. The Wild Queen!"

The nearness of the adventure sparked in our eyes. We stood there, solemnly, and clasped hands. On rough maps Koenig outlined our search for that day. We were to meet at opportune places every few hours. Once again we clasped hands, and broke up. I took the slope away to the left.

I would rather not go into detail on the following, heartbreaking three weeks. We did not discover the beautiful Queen of the Koru Range before sunset that day; and some twenty-odd other sunsets followed just as fruitlessly for us. Each night we returned to the ship empty-handed, empty-hearted, tired, forlorn. Courage waned. More than once I knew it wouldn't have taken much to decide me to abandon the search. It was logical to believe my companions felt likewise.

One morning . . . I forget how many days it was after we first set down in the mountains . . . Koenig came into possession of an idea.

"Putnam! Can you find that spot again where we first landed?"

"Easily," I affirmed. "But what for?"

"I suddenly thought of something. We have been dunces not to think of it before! Not far from that spot should be the body of the Martian who fell from the ship. We must find that body."

"I can do better than that," I interrupted. "Better than just the spot where we landed, I mean. I think I can get pretty near to where he fell. I seem to recall the terrain we were passing over at the time. Why?"

"Don't you see?" he was impatient. "That body will draw mountain rats. And where a pack is, is apt to be our Queen!"

"Brilliant thinking!" Evans exclaimed.

Next morning we hovered over the approximate spot where the Martian brigand fell. "It's about here," I called out. "We were between that jutting ledge over there—" I pointed it out, "—and those rocks here."

"I think I see something!" Evans cried. "Set her down!"

Silently I dropped the ship down to the ledge we had seen from the air. The three

of us clambered out, awed. We stood by the ship and gazed down into the rock-strewn valley. Evans indicated a pile of huge boulders, behind which he believed was the scene he had seen from the air. Together we set out.

As quietly as we could, we scrambled across the rocks and around the jutting ledges towards the spot. We stopped just this side of the boulders we were making for.

Koenig motioned for quiet as sounds of gnawing came from the rocks. Silently we faced one another. Koenig put out his hand. We clasped. He didn't speak, but looked into our eyes, and we knew what he was thinking:

"Gentlemen—around these rocks probably lies our goal! The Wild Queen of the Koru Range! We have made the bargain, sealed it. The first man to her side wins her hand! Are we ready, gentlemen?"

And as if he had asked the question aloud, we nodded. Again we shook hands. I straightened my clothes, rearranged my tie and helmet. The sounds of definite activity on the further side of the cluster of boulders activated us.

Together we sprang around the rocks, shouting!

Koenig somehow managed the lead before we had gone ten feet, Evans followed hard on his heels. I had the ill luck to twist my ankle on a stone and lost several steps as a result; was five to ten feet behind Evans. Koenig rounded the last rock in front, was lost to my sight. Instantly Evans followed. Cursing, casting caution to the wind, I sped on, ignoring the bounding pain in my ankle. I rounded the last rock at full speed, crashed head-on into Evans who stopped still. It wasn't his fault, he had crashed likewise into Koenig, in the lead. Koenig stood where he stopped, braced against the shock of our crashing into him from behind. I caught a glimpse of thousands of frightened rats scurrying away over the boulders.

The three of us were face to face with the Wild Queen of the Koru Range!

IT WAS AN electric moment. The rats had deserted us. On the ground between us lay the ravaged skeleton of the misguided Martian. Koenig, Evans and I were lined up on one side, while not ten feet away across the skeleton was the Queen. The Wild Queen! Koenig looked at Evans,

Evans passed the stare on to me, and I looked back to the Queen.

In her hand was a parcel of flesh; torn I knew, from the body of the unfortunate Martian. Strangely unafraid, she stood her ground and glared at us. Stupefied we stared back.

I looked at her hair. Witch's hair; it hung almost to her knees and of course never knew a comb. Tangled, matted and ratted, it hung in knots and lumps, nested with burrs and weeds; further decorated by some small human bones she had woven into the dirty strands.

The left eye was missing. Gouged out in some manner unknown, the gaping hole it had left so long ago stared redly at us, sickening to the sight.

She opened her mouth, and I knew the consequences of an Earthling torn from the little necessities of civilization. But few teeth graced her mouth. These few were browned, rotting, pointed fangs. Needle-sharp and needle-thin, employed for ripping meat from bone.

One arm hung askew at a crazy, impossible angle and I looked to see the cause. The arm had been broken long ago and never reset. It grew and continued to grow in the fashion it found itself. The dislodged bone in the arm caused the whole to jut sidewise at an ugly angle. Monstrous.

She was naked, having never known clothes. And dirty; her only baths must have been accidental falls into small bodies of water, or when caught in a mountain storm. And it rains seldom on Mars. The corresponding odor of her was overpowering. Her feet were hardened and black from mountain travelling, her legs bare, of course. Upon her ankles were hundreds and hundreds of vicious red marks. Rat bites. Covering her skin.

And then the electric moment was broken. Like a flash she turned and sped away after her rats. Before our startled eyes she streaked across a boulder and vanished into a cave mouth. A dislodged bone came rattling out in our faces.

With one accord we turned and ran the other way. My throbbing ankle was never thought of as I sprinted for the ship. I heard Koenig.

"I'm looking for a Martian!" he hissed, actually hissed. "I'm looking for a Martian who dotes on Indians. Someday soon I shall meet that Martian!"

We sped away from the Koru Range.